

**A TORAH/TANAKH TOUR DE FORCE: EXPLORING THE LITERARY DEVICES
AND PURPOSEFUL PATTERNS IN THE HEBREW BIBLE**

Jonathan Weil 4 Wed. Classes: June 9, 16, 23, 30 1-3:30pm 2.5 hrs. per class

What are the literary devices and purposeful patterns in the Hebrew Bible that help to make it the single greatest work of literature ever written? How is this artfulness used to advance meaning; theme and character; and the narrative line itself? How does it create our *active* engagement and feeling?

Our course will focus, among other literary elements, on the use of repetition; on poetry and “heightened” speech, particularly the poetry of parallelism; on symbol, metaphor and archetype; on hyperbole and understatement; on literary and formulaic conventions of the time; on seemingly inexplicable narrative interruptions and jarring juxtapositions; on deliberate “gaps” in meaning, ambiguity and violations of expectation; and on the use of two contradictory or complementary versions to tell a single story.

We will show that virtually nothing is random, illogical, arbitrary or accidental. Everything is artful, purposeful, and designed for deliberate effect and affect; to elicit our active engagement; and, ultimately, to help the reader-responder make meaning.

Examples abound on every page of the Bible: the “stone” motif to help us construct Jacob’s character and chief “identity theme”; the archetypal betrothal-well scene to define characters as diverse as Isaac, Moses, Ruth and Samson; the seemingly odd “interruption” of the Judah-Tamar story in the middle of the Joseph narrative; the two versions of the story of creation; the repetitive themes/motifs of visual deception, and of the special privilege accorded to the second/younger son and infertile woman, among many others.

If Torah presents “70 faces,” as our sages claim, then the study of but one “face” -- its literary face -- provides an exciting and potential pathway to uncover much that, at first glance, may seem “hidden” and inexplicable ... if not incoherent and intractable.

As a special feature, the course will provide the opportunity for a literary examination of the four parshot in *Numbers* that correspond to our four classes – three of them (the Korach Rebellion, the Red Cow, the Balak/Balaam Prophecy/Curse) among the most challenging parshot in all of Torah. Rabbi Spitzer’s Tuesday Torah classes – coming, as they do, *before* our class sessions -- will also afford us the opportunity for further interpretation and insight, and significantly help to guide and structure our own course.

THIS COURSE IS FOR YOU ... if you can actively engage in 2.5 hours of exploration per class and stay the course; respond feelingly as well as cognitively; prefer discussion to lecture; and can take the class home with you and do the assignments between classes. **IT IS FOR YOU** ... if you want to not simply read the Book but *become* the Book; if you want to uncover a potentially new approach to the Hebrew Bible; and if you want to discover, surprisingly, how a literary approach can enhance rather than diminish religiosity and spirituality.

JONATHAN WEIL has studied, taught and written about the Hebrew Bible since he was 23. Hence, he has three passions in life: Torah, Torah, and Torah. (You can add to that literature generally, the visual arts, and opera, if you must.) He does not believe you should read Torah but *become* Torah – that is, experience it, feel it, re-create it, actively engage with it ... Become the prophets and their prophecies, cross the Red Sea, make the Golden Calf, and experience the sacrifice of Isaac. He believes that all meaning is derived from the dynamic transaction between reader-responder and text. All art is ambiguous ... *with unique and purposeful patterns* ... that must be discovered and felt by responders ... *with their own unique patterns of response*. Ultimately, we are not only reading THE text but “writing” our own ... and, in the process, creating our own particular “poem” for a given text. While the teacher plays a role in the process, it is YOU -- artful readers -- who must take center stage, be the shakers and movers, and discover for yourself those unique patterns that make meaning ... and, ultimately, make the Hebrew Bible the greatest story ever told.